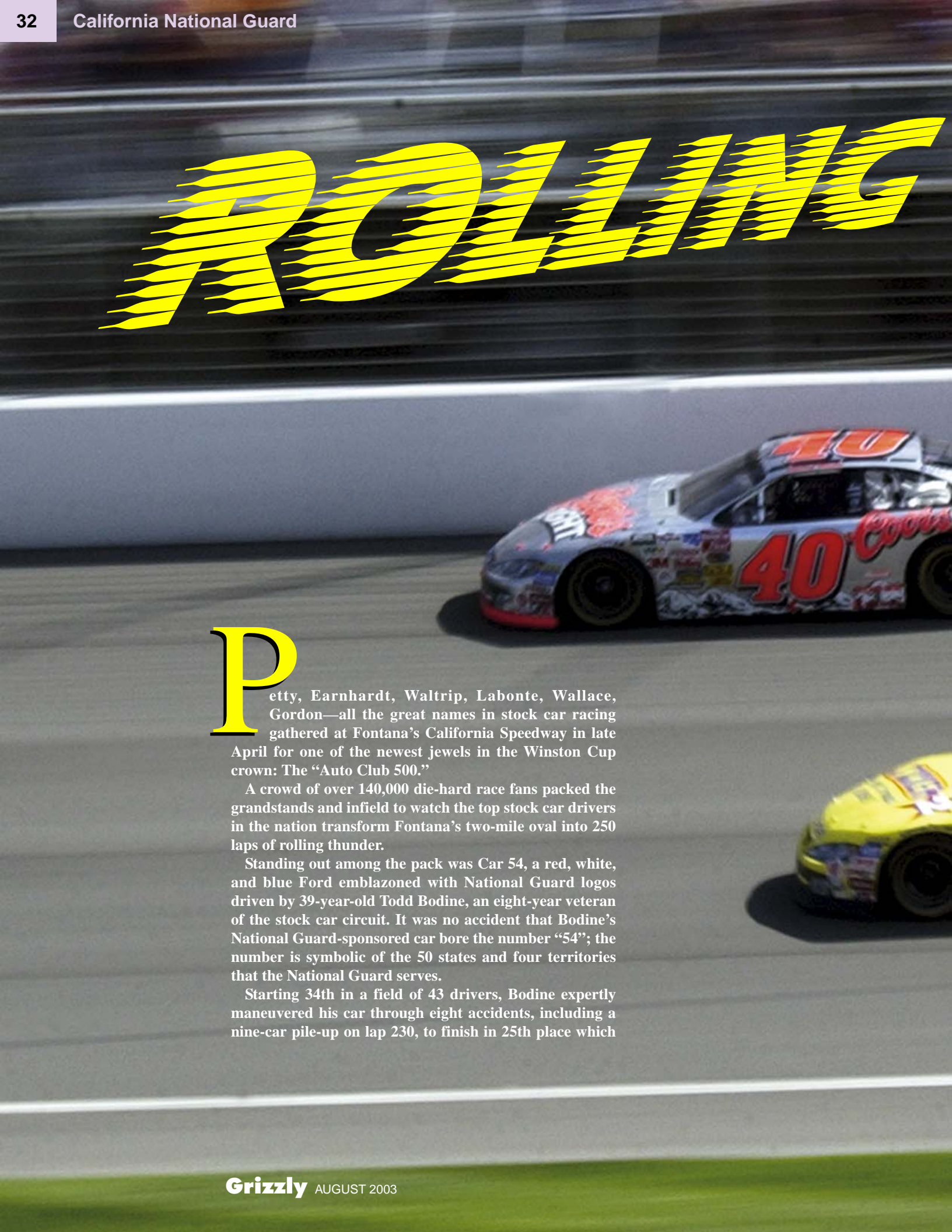


ROLLING



Petty, Earnhardt, Waltrip, Labonte, Wallace, Gordon—all the great names in stock car racing gathered at Fontana’s California Speedway in late April for one of the newest jewels in the Winston Cup crown: The “Auto Club 500.”

A crowd of over 140,000 die-hard race fans packed the grandstands and infield to watch the top stock car drivers in the nation transform Fontana’s two-mile oval into 250 laps of rolling thunder.

Standing out among the pack was Car 54, a red, white, and blue Ford emblazoned with National Guard logos driven by 39-year-old Todd Bodine, an eight-year veteran of the stock car circuit. It was no accident that Bodine’s National Guard-sponsored car bore the number “54”; the number is symbolic of the 50 states and four territories that the National Guard serves.

Starting 34th in a field of 43 drivers, Bodine expertly maneuvered his car through eight accidents, including a nine-car pile-up on lap 230, to finish in 25th place which

THUNDER

The National Guard Races in
Winston Cup's "Auto Club 500"
at the California Speedway in
Fontana.



By Colonel Ernie Zuick
Photographs by SFC Robert Pack

The National Guard was the undisputed winner in the advertising competition!

was good enough for a \$71,700 payday. Not bad for four-hours work.

Why is the National Guard Bureau spending \$4.2 million a year to sponsor a stock car in today's tight-fisted, and budget-strapped environment? National Guard recruiting and retention is down, and stock car racing has fast become one of America's top sporting events. And the sport is extremely popular among 17-34 year olds who just happen to be the target audience the National Guard wants to attract. This, together with the fact that every Winston Cup race is televised nationally for approximately four hours, watched by millions of viewers each week, and shown on the Armed Forces network, \$4.2 million is a small price to pay for such advertising exposure. Sure, it's an "out-of-the-box" advertising approach, but that's

exactly what it takes to succeed in today's tough and competitive military recruiting market.

Behind the Scenes

With sponsors ranging from Coors to Viagra, the race-within-the-race is to see which advertiser can get the most "bang" for the advertising buck. How did the California National Guard fare in that department? Extremely well, thank you.

Enter Sergeant First Class John Metzler, a 37-year-old marketing wizard with an inventive mind rivaled only by that of Thomas Edison's, who serves as the California Army National Guard's Marketing NCO in Sacramento and who is supported by a forward-thinking Director of Recruiting and Retention by the name of Lieutenant Colonel Tony Palumbo. Metzler



asked for and received still photo and video support from the Media Services Directorate at the Office of The Adjutant General. He also arranged for a National Guard Blackhawk helicopter to hover over the California Speedway while a California Army Guard Air Assault Team rappelled to the infield. Once on the ground, the team unfurled a huge American Flag before an enthusiastic crowd that began chanting, "USA! USA! USA!" as F-16s streaked overhead. All of this was televised nationally by Fox Television. Buying equivalent advertising time on the Fox Network would have cost well over \$100,000.

Additionally, videotape shot by Media Service's Staff Sergeant Jesse Flag was borrowed by Fox and edited into a humorous sequence showing how the National Guard's driver Todd Bodine supposedly gets to the race track. It showed Bodine hopping into a Humvee, driving to a Blackhawk helicopter, flying to the race track, then rappelling to the infield. The sequence was shown in its entirety on national television and amounted to over \$100,000 additional advertising for the National Guard.

The National Guard's Car 54 might have only placed 25th in the "Auto Club 500," but the Guard was the undisputed winner in the advertising competition with well over \$200,000 worth of free advertising—over and above the advertising garnered by Car 54's 250 laps around the Fontana oval displaying the National Guard's logo before the national television cameras for approximately four hours. Sweet!

What happened to the amazing Sergeant First Class Metzler who put all of this together? Unfortunately, he no longer works for the California National Guard. The National Guard Bureau made him an offer he couldn't refuse: To head its marketing department in Washington D.C.

Oh, well, as any champion stock car driver will tell you, "You can't win them all." 🐾

LEFT PHOTO: Todd Bodine makes a pit stop. Many races are won in the pits where critical, precious seconds count.

RIGHT PHOTO: A California Army Guard Air Assault Team, from Modesto's 1-184th, rappels from a Blackhawk helicopter to the track's infield where it unfurled a huge American flag.

